

## **BLOOMFIELD TOWN COUNCIL**

### **LAND USE & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SUBCOMMITTEE**

There was a regular meeting of the above referenced subcommittee held on Tuesday, June 12, 2013 at 7:00 p.m. in Conference Room #5, Bloomfield Town Hall, 800 Bloomfield Avenue, Bloomfield, CT.

Committee members present were: Councilor Gamble

Absent were: Councilor Jacobs and Deputy Mayor Hypolite

Also present were: Mayor Schulman, Councilors Rivers and Merritt, India Rodgers, Clerk of Council, Thom Hooper, Director of Planning, Heidi Samokar, Planimetrics, Jerry Long, Michelle Bononi, Bonnie Bercowetz, Bob Wiener, Erin LaManna and Philip Schenck, Interim Town Manager

The meeting was called to order at 7:03 p.m.

#### **Discussion and Evaluation of the Plan for the Town Center**

Over the past nine months, Mr. Thom Hooper, Director of Planning and the Economic Development Commission (EDC) have met with stakeholders in town to decide what the future holds for business development in Bloomfield.

Ms. Heidi Samokar, Senior Planner of Planimetrics presented and highlighted final recommendations of the Plan of Conservation & Development for the Town Center. Ms. Samokar also recommended goals and strategies to be completed within the first year and beyond.

The key findings from the study and evaluation of the Plan of Conservation & Development for the Town Center were:

1. New Development = Redevelopment to achieve more of a traditional village setting
2. Through a market study it was noted the need for increased demand with the retail, restaurants and office space
3. Building on diversity and the emergence of International cuisine as a community
4. Identifying innovative ways to resolve the parking issues in the town center
5. Zoning in place and framework for redevelopment
6. Identifying a leader or group to carry forth recommendations in the Plan of Conservation & Development

The plan has some achievable short term goals such as: showing level of commitment and progress during the first year, building confidence within Town Hall and the community that the town center will be revitalized.

The plan also has some long term aspirations of spurring redevelopment as a whole.

Ms. Samokar reviewed the five prong strategic direction of the plan:

1. Strengthen the Town's ability to do Economic Development in Bloomfield Center. The need to a point person at the staff level, committee or commission that will oversee the implementation of the Plan is essential to its overall success.

The current plan recommended the EDC to take the lead to implement the plan. Staff and EDC will have a checks and balance approach to report findings back to the Council.

2. Support and assist in growth of existing businesses. Staff supports to assist businesses who would like to meet regularly to promote the Town Center. Utilizing media outlets, social events, i.e. grub crawl to create buzz for the center. Possible local façade improvement programs and identifying areas for public parking, i.e. Town Hall front lot
3. Fill vacancies – short-term options (displaying artwork in vacant storefronts), long term options (focusing on the 4R's – retail, restaurants, recreation and residential) Possibly provide loan or grant façade program assistance.
4. Create a climate of investment through own town investment – committed to improving public spaces such as: Filley Park and the Town Green
5. Setting the framework for longer term development – zoning in place to help achieve vision of more mixed use, development and walkable town center. Provide technical assistance to landowners that are prepared to move forward in redevelopment. The role of the Town when redevelopment occurs could be a facilitator, advisor of whole scale partner to improve infrastructure.

There was a brief discussion regarding the possible closure of Seneca Road. The idea to close Seneca Road has been a recurring topic of discussion. The closure would result in the possibility for additional parking by the old Farmer's Exchange building.

How to Use the Plan

The plan could be used by setting annual priorities, creating a work plan and seek grants/funding to accomplish set goals.

## Final Recommendations from Planimetrics – 1<sup>st</sup> year

A memorandum was submitted to the EDC with the top 8 recommendations that could be accomplished in the 1<sup>st</sup> year:

1. Make sure every stakeholder receives a printed copy of the Plan of Conservation & Development.
2. Develop strategies to resolve parking issues at Town Hall.
3. Building the brand of Bloomfield Center – updating the town website
4. Utilizing the community electronic signs to identify town center
5. Set up a meeting with the owner of the Farmer's Exchange
6. Coordinate a restaurant event – possible grub crawl
7. Identify opportunities for art work to display in vacant storefronts
8. Starter activity with all restaurants promotion collectively

A discussion ensued regarding primary focus and next steps to achieve goals of the Plan of Conservation & Development.

Councilor Merritt suggested that the EDC should take charge and manage the lead entity roles for implementation of the Plan. These roles include:

- Set annual priorities of which actions to focus upon
- Monitor the implementation status of this Plan
- Report progress to the Town Council
- Update this Plan as actions are completed and new ideas or priorities arise
- Appear before other town commissions to support projects and improvements in Bloomfield Center.

Councilor Merritt also suggested signage on major roads to identify Town Center location.

Councilor Gamble would like to ensure that the Town Center is walkable and accessible. In regards to an Economic Development Consultant, the Land Use & Economic Development Subcommittee met and discussed a list of attributes for hiring staff. She also elaborated on possible outlets for entrepreneurship opportunities in conjunction with existing businesses.

Mr. Philip Schenck, Interim Town Manager noted the level of funding approved for FY13-14 for additional support for the Economic Development efforts, whether hiring of a consultant or firm to assist the lead entity with administrative/research duties.

He also stated that Economic Development is a multi-faceted and has been primarily focused on the development of the Town Center. However, another aspect of Economic Development is working with existing businesses in the community as well as working with incentives that are authorized under state statutes. There is an enterprise zone in the community. In achieving some of these goals, the Town Administration has held preliminary discussions with the University of Hartford, possibility to increase community events, while coordinating the Town Center component utilizing an organizational model.

Mayor Schulman suggested that the EDC be the lead organization to accomplish goals of the Plan. He stated that communication between the Commission and the Council is essential for its success. He also supported the plan to hire a consultant or additional staff assistance as needed. Mayor Schulman stressed the importance of identifying a “brand” to attract a variety of businesses to Bloomfield Center.

Ms. Samokar reiterated the outcome of the final plan over the past nine months. She identified the 4 R’s – retail, restaurants, recreation and residential to fill vacancies on recruiting a variety of businesses. Moreover, the plan also focuses on building a “brand” for the Town and developing an overall marketing campaign.

Ms. Bonnie Bercowetz stated that there is a potential to expand on the variety of restaurant theme as a “brand” to attract business to Bloomfield. The plan is to market this theme through an Economic Development consultant or firm. The role of the town is to build demand and support tenants.

Ms. Samokar explained that currently all of the restaurants realize that there is a strategic advantage of doing business in Bloomfield.

Mr. Jerry Long emphasized the adoption of the plan as written by the consultant, identifying the lead organization or commission and appoints staff or hires a consultant to assist.

Councilor Gamble suggested to build on the theme of “International Flavor Cuisine” and include an interactive entertainment facility.

Mrs. Michelle Balboni explained the advantages of wanting to do business in Bloomfield. There is a village theme, free parking, highway access, variety of restaurants and shops. She also reviewed the charges of the Economic Development Commission. The Commission is in need of staff support and recognizes its qualities as a board with long term residency, level of service, expertise in planning and business.

The Economic Development Commission will meet in July and make recommendations back to Council.

### **Adjournment**

It was moved by Councilor Rivers, seconded by Councilor Gamble and voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 8:20 p.m.